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CIA Reworking Philosophy To Avoid Errors Of Pa

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(Last of Three)

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) now under Congressional investigation is making some changes of its own to keep in step with the times.

William E. Colby, CIA director, made this statement during an interview recently in its headquarters at Langley, Va.

"The United States set up an intelligence system right after World War Two," he said, "which reflected the opinion at that time about intelligence. Intelligence was something to be put under the table and never talked about and never looked at."

"That's not good enough today. So we are relooking at the philosophical approach toward intelligence. What we're saying is that now we have a view of intelligence responsibility."

"We must have some secrets but we also have to be reassured as to what its real function is."

Philosophy Outdated

"We are in the process of reevaluation. We are setting up the structure here and understanding a philosophy if you will, of intelligence in our free society which I think will go on for 10 to 20 years. Then I think we'll be relooked again."

Colby pointed out the original philosophy is nearly 30 years old and outdated.

"I think the changes being made will bring us up to date and that people will be satisfied; that after they take a look at our intelligence structure they will find it a good structure; that it does a good job and an important job."

He also repeated what he has said earlier at a hearing that there have been mistakes made in the past.

Some Transgressions

"There have been some transgressions in the past," he said, "but today I'm pretty sure we are clear. We've taken considerable steps around here to make sure that we stay right within our charter. People here want to do the right thing."

"If we have done anything wrong in the past, they have been very few things, very infrequent things. They were done in the belief at that time that they were somehow justified."

"It's hard to apply the standards of one time to the situations of another time. I'm sure that someone will come along in 1990 and be critical of what I did. Maybe they'd say I didn't do enough or maybe that I did too much. I'm sure they will be critical because they will have a different perspective or viewpoint."

Being Corrected

He said he is leaning over backward to make certain that everything is being done correctly by the agency today.

The intelligence machine, he said, will either be "corrected or adjusted" to make sure it doesn't make any mistakes in the future. "Then public confidence will be re-established and we can go back to work," he added.

Some of the internal adjustments being made include the use of a system whereby anyone in the organization can speak up if he thinks the director is wrong.

This is a remarkable thing in a governmental operation where the lower echelon seldom can reach the top with their views.

"And we encourage this," Colby said.

Colby also makes a point when time permits to lunch with a half-dozen junior CIA employees in order "to get a feel about what they are doing and thinking and are concerned about."

Encourages Differences

A difference of opinion is not only permitted but encouraged. This particularly applies to evaluation of intelligence material.

Out of this will come decisions which may govern future actions of this country in dealing with critical situations in other parts of the world.

I referred to charges the CIA opened private mail in this country. I asked if this was true.

"Yes, unfortunately it is," he replied. "I've testified to that. We thought we were doing the right thing. I don't think it was the right thing and we've stopped it."

"It was mail going to a communist country. We picked it out to learn who was communicating with whom and with what organization back in that country. Sometimes we were looking for the kinds of censorship that might be used. The reason we did this was because we would have an agent who might be sent to that country and have to write back to us."

"We wanted to protect our agents and warn them so they would not get caught. That sort of technical inspection wasn't to study the substance of the mail but nevertheless it was not proper and we shouldn't have done it."

One of the charges made in the investigations was that CIA was exceeding the limits of its charter which designated it to handle worldwide intelligence whereas the Federal Bureau of Investigation handled the intelligence within the United States.

The charge was made that the CIA was involved in anti-war dissidents in this country.

Needed Credentials

Colby replied: "There has been a lot of exaggeration about the CIA operating some domestic police function. This is not true."

"We're such as, were in dissident so that credentials could we"

"Some were we cans. It was not"

activity, but unfortunately it was said to be a terrible thing.

"This bothered the morale of our people, they felt this was unfair. Some of them got out of the service. Some felt that if we ever did anything improper we should reveal everything, and wear a hair shirt and so forth."

Different Views

"There are different views in the agency and this pulls and tugs a little. It's a natural reaction of both sides. It is my job to try and keep them both together and not let them go off at 180 degrees apart."

Then he turned to a sensitive subject, that of keeping secrets.

"I must confess that we are having a great deal of concern about our ability to keep secrets. Not so much secrets as much as the impressions we are giving to some people abroad. Some of our friends abroad are worried that their names will come out."

"Some foreign governments that are working quietly and secretly with us couldn't do it publicly. They are concerned and wondering if we can keep our secrets. Some of our people, some of our agents abroad, have resigned. They say they can't take a chance anymore."

"Some governments have expressed great concern about whether they should give us their sensitive materials if we can't protect them. I think we can. I think that the Congressional investigations that will take place shortly will be a responsible inquiry."

published reports, whether true or false, favorable or unfavorable to the agency or its personnel.

CIA does not publicly discuss its organization, its budget or its personnel. Nor does it discuss its methods of operation or its sources of information.

It can't by the terms of its charter. It's a secret organization that is committed to protecting this country from foreign influences.

Get Blamed

As a result, the CIA often gets the blame for things it has had no hand in.

U.S. Sen. Stuart Symington, Missouri, did a great deal of the cross-examination of witnesses when Colby appeared before a Senate committee to be confirmed as director of the agency a year and a half ago.

At one point in the testimony Symington said that other government agencies have the tendency to "dump any ill-fated operation on the CIA because they can't defend themselves."

He cited one incident when an enemy agent was killed and the CIA was blamed. Symington said he knew for fact that the CIA had "recommended urgently" that the agent not be killed.

"I know about this case because I investigated it personally," the senator said.

Yet the Central Intelligence Agency was blamed.

The CIA is accountable directly to the President.

What have some of the leaders felt about the agency?

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